

Please amend the Application as follows.

IN THE CLAIMS:

The present listing of claims replaces all prior versions and listings of claims in the application.

Claims 1 - 13. (Cancelled).

Claim 14. (Currently Amended) A silicon nitride material comprising:

- (a) a sintering aid ~~selected from the group consisting of rare earth metal oxides, Al_2O_3 and Y_2O_3 combinations thereof;~~ and
 - (b) silicon dioxide;
- the sintering aids and silicon dioxide being present in a grain boundary phase;

wherein,

- (i) the silicon dioxide in the grain boundary phase and the sintering aid in the grain boundary phase have a molar ratio of (silicon dioxide) to (silicon dioxide and sintering aid) that is from greater than 65% to 74%,
- (ii) the silicon nitride material has a silicon oxide nitride content that is less than 1% by weight, and
- (iii) said silicon nitride material has a porosity of less than [[2]] 0.5 % by volume, further wherein said silicon nitride material has a mass loss of less than or equal to 0.3 mg/cm^2 when immersed in HCl at a temperature of 60°C for 500 hours.

Claim 15. (Cancelled)

Claim 16. (Previously Presented) The silicon nitride material of Claim 14, wherein the sintering aids and the silicon dioxide are present at an amount so that the grain boundary phase is < 20% by volume.

Claim 17. (Previously Presented) The silicon nitride material of Claim 14, wherein the sintering aids and the silicon dioxide are present at an amount so that the grain boundary phase is from 0.1 to 17% by volume.

Claim 18. (Previously Presented) The silicon nitride material of Claim 14, wherein the sintering aids and the silicon dioxide are present at an amount so that the grain boundary phase is from 3 to 15% by volume.

Claims 19 - 22. (Cancelled).

Claim 23. (Cancelled)

Claim 24. (Previously Presented) The silicon nitride material of Claim 14 further comprising up to 15 mole percent of an additive selected from the group consisting of SiC, TiCN, TiN, HfO₂ and combinations thereof, said additive being retained as a disperse phase.

Claim 25. (Previously Presented) The silicon nitride material of Claim 24 further comprising a silicide selected from the group consisting of tungsten silicide, molybdenum silicide and combinations thereof, wherein the TiN, tungsten silicide and molybdenum silicide are formed by reacting TiO₂, WO₃ and MoO₃ with silicon nitride in a ratio of TiO₂, WO₃ and MoO₃ to silicon nitride of up to 10 mole percent.

Claim 26. (New) The silicon nitride material of Claim 14 wherein the silicon dioxide in the grain boundary phase and the sintering aid in the grain boundary phase have a molar ratio of (silicon dioxide) to (silicon dioxide and sintering aid) of 74%.

Claim 27. (New) The silicon nitride material of Claim 14 wherein the silicon dioxide in the grain boundary phase and the sintering aid in the grain boundary phase have a molar ratio of (silicon dioxide) to (silicon dioxide and sintering aid) of 72%.

Claim 28. (New) The silicon nitride material of Claim 14 wherein Y_2O_3 of sintering aid (a) is present in an amount of 62.5 mole percent, based on the total moles of Y_2O_3 and Al_2O_3 , and Al_2O_3 of sintering aid (a) is present in an amount of 37.5 mole percent, based on the total moles of Y_2O_3 and Al_2O_3 .